


## EXAMINING THE ROLE OF WORD OF MOUTH IN PURCHASE DECISION: AN INSIGHT FROM FASHION STORE

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**Abstract.** The fashion business has a dynamic that adapts to the trends that are lighthearted and favored. A store can survive by providing clothes that fit the trend and adapt to the wishes of consumers. Word of mouth has not been investigated much in providing information to consumers that a store is following the trend. The study aims to examine the role of word of mouth in mediating the effects of store atmosphere and brand loyalty toward purchase decisions. The research employs a quantitative approach, with 118 respondents appropriate as the research sample. The results indicate that brand loyalty, brand image, and word of mouth directly affect purchase decisions; however, store atmosphere does not affect consumer purchase. The result also indicates that word of mouth mediates brand loyalty, brand image, and store atmosphere towards consumer purchase decisions. Based on the result, word of mouth is a prominent aspect of determining purchase decisions. Consumers decide to purchase based on information suitable to the fashion trend. Positive information leads consumers to purchase; hence, the store should emphasize and utilize word of mouth to create consumer purchase decisions.

**Keywords:** word of mouth, purchase decision, store atmosphere, brand loyalty, brand image.

**JEL Classification:** M30, M31, M39.

### Introduction

Business competition in the current era is getting stronger. Consequently, the company needs a strategy to prevail in the market to increase its market share. Gaining market share requires a marketing strategy to create a positive brand image in consumers' perception. Forming a brand image needs a process to develop; however, it requires gradual stages (Propheto et al., 2020). Brand image establishes through advertising the product or spreading positive word of mouth (Sallam, 2014). Positive information by word of mouth will create a popular brand image. Word of mouth is salient in the marketing process to provide positive information. The formation of positive word of mouth will affect purchasing decisions. Consumer loyalty towards a brand should emphasize to influence purchases. Establishing customer brand loyalty is needed to purchase several times and get satisfaction. To obtain this satisfaction, the store always serves well and excellently. The process of gaining brand loyalty is not an instant thing but requires gradual stages. Brand loyalty and brand image require consumer perception and response in

creating memories (Khudri & Sultana, 2015). When consumers feel that a fashion brand can satisfy their needs and a consumer's desire to conform to a particular brand, they will make a purchase decision. Activities to decide on a purchase are not carried out immediately but require a purchase decision stage.

Word of mouth in the current era is very easy to do either directly or through online media. Word-of-mouth is one of the determinants of purchasing decisions in a clothing store. Word of mouth helps the decision-making process by ensuring that consumers have a match with the clothing product that has been reviewed. Word of mouth is information that is widely circulated either directly through reference groups or indirectly through social media. Word of mouth is one of the indicators in determining the purchase to convince consumers that the product is a product that meets the desired criteria. Brand image is the consumer's perception of a product (Blasi et al., 2020). The brand image appears when consumers get information directly through advertisements or reference groups. Buying clothes requires many considerations,

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one of which is compatibility. One indicator of suitability is a brand's image following the self-concept. Self-concept is a strong indicator that will determine the suitability of a brand. Self-concept is an overall evaluation of oneself in consuming a need. When consumers have a self-concept, all purchasing decisions will be based on that concept and affect the decision to buy clothes (Gillani et al., 2016).

The study also tested store atmosphere on purchasing decisions. Previous research indicates that when consumers come to a store, the attributes of a store have an important role in determining purchasing decisions (Blut et al., 2018). A store with various attributes with characteristics under buyer behavior will further increase the urge to make a clothing purchase decision. The store atmosphere is one indicator that triggers consumer purchases. Store atmosphere becomes important information through word of mouth so that consumers interested in the information will make purchasing decisions. The important role of the atmosphere is to trigger consumer perceptions of a store. When consumers perceive positively, namely by interpreting that the store follows the self-concept (McNeill, 2018), the purchasing decision is stronger. When consumers have stronger decisions, they form repeat purchases. Word of mouth is information related to the store atmosphere so that it affects purchasing decisions. A consumer who has come to shop will inform the reference group or through social media about the condition of the store at the time of shopping, which becomes word of mouth.

## 1. Literature review

Brand loyalty emerges when a consumer likes a product and its benefits. An individual's behavior towards a product can be described through his affection toward other individuals through love (Foroudi et al., 2018). Consumers who have felt a sense of love will buy products continuously. Consumers who have a sense of love are due to good experiences when consuming products (Rather & Camilleri, 2019). The discussion of brand loyalty, brand image, word of mouth, store atmosphere on purchasing decisions, discussed as follows:

### 1.1. Hypothesis development

The store atmosphere, which combines physical characteristics, attempts to attract consumer emotion to buy the product (Naletelich & Paswan, 2018). Store atmosphere impresses consumer emotions to create impulse buying (Barros et al., 2019). Store physical environment predisposes consumer perception mechanism, including enchanted view, music to hear, perfume scent, and sensory touch. The stimulus, for instance, color, sound, light, temperature, and object placement promotes consumer purchase (Wahyu et al., 2017). The store environment setting strategy encourages consumers to purchase. The picturesque and neat store atmosphere stimulates consumer desire to visit and enables buy (Barros et al., 2019). The store atmosphere is why consumers select a

store; the perception mechanism leads to purchase decisions (Nell, 2017). Previous research indicates store atmosphere strongly affects purchase decisions (Helmefalk & Hultén, 2017).

*H1: Store atmosphere positively and significantly affects purchase decisions.*

Brand loyalty is defined as consumer emotional connection that trust and tenacious in purchasing a certain brand (Foroudi et al., 2018). Consumer relationship with brands establishes brand loyalty, which begins from repeat purchase, then consumer appropriate with the service, appearance, price, and other product attributes (Fetscherin et al., 2014). Consumer attitude to respond to brand attributes impact the consumer buying process. Sallam (2014), brand loyalty is faithfulness that consumers do not switch to another brand due to excellence and emotional attachment. Sallam (2014) denote brand loyalty influence consumer purchase decisions.

*H2: Brand loyalty positively and significantly affects purchase decisions.*

The positioning and well-established brand ensure consumers have a strong bond with a brand. The consumer-brand relationship preserves long-term and creates brand image. The brand image exhibits the relationship between the brand and consumer interpretation to form a consideration regarding the product (Severi & Ling, 2013). The perception contained in the brand image is that consumers choose products based on the analysis that the product can satisfy their needs. The brand image encourages the consumer to make purchasing decisions. Consumer needs when consumers have a view in deciding on a suitable brand that can meet their needs, the product is in product evaluation of the available options. Brand image is a perception in consumers' minds that the brand has a set of attributes that can satisfy the need when the brand delivers an advertisement and consumers get information related to product attributes (Durrani et al., 2015). The emergence of trust in the product builds a perception that certain brands provide services that are in accordance with the wishes of consumers purchasing decisions based on the suitability between the thoughts and needs of consumers on the attributes of the advertised product to form a brand image (Hofmann et al., 2021). Based on the elaboration, the brand image tends to influence purchasing decisions.

*H3: Brand image positively and significantly affect purchase decisions.*

The attributes of a store play an important role in increasing consumer convenience during shopping (Blut et al., 2018). When consumers shop with features that cause comforts, such as quiet music and attractive ornaments, it is essential to improve a store's sales. The store's atmosphere creates an emotional bond that forms various perceptions and interpretations that arise in the minds of consumers (Nell, 2017). Comfort is an essential aspect that

emerges after perception and interpretation through consumers’ five senses. Consumer behavior according affects shopping convenience. When consumers are pampered with various attributes, that can provide the impetus to spend more. Consumers who conform to these attributes play a role in increasing store sales and the tendency to make purchase decisions because of their interests (Shah et al., 2021). Based on the description that has been presented, the store Atmosphere affects purchasing decisions through word of mouth.

*H4: Word of mouth mediates the influence of store atmosphere on purchase decisions.*

Brand loyalty is the embodiment of loyalty to a particular brand. When a brand has qualities and characteristics, consumer behavior recognizes these characteristics (Millan et al., 2013). When a brand has a positive character, it encourages consumers to have loyalty, known as brand loyalty. Forming brand loyalty is with quality and service realized through business activities. The company’s business activities have increased trust to create brand loyalty (Rather & Camilleri, 2019). Information related to product trust forms word of mouth so that representation and information about a brand will be the basis for making purchasing decisions. Consumers who have loyalty will decide to buy a product through word of mouth.

*H5: Word of mouth mediates the influence of brand loyalty toward purchase decisions.*

Brand image is a picture and representation of a brand. When a brand has a positive representation, it will affect purchasing decisions (Severi & Ling, 2013). Positive representation is shown through word of mouth that is in consumer conversations. A brand with a positive brand image will further strengthen the consumer’s desire to buy (Wijaya & Annisa, 2020). The spread of positive news determines the process of consumer buying behavior through word of mouth. Activities in promoting products are realized through positive word of mouth in consumer conversations (Duan & Dholakia, 2017).

*H6: Word of mouth mediates the influence of brand image on purchase decisions.*

Word of mouth is the dissemination of information related to the brand. Word of mouth represents the brand through news or information related to the brand proposition (Srivastava, 2015). Positive word of mouth will affect purchasing decisions. Spreading word-of-mouth is carried out either through social media or directly. Dissemination through social media spread quickly because consumers in the current era depend on the internet (Blut et al., 2018). The power of social media in influencing consumer purchasing decisions is very strong. Consumer activities to obtain information through social media will be related to spreading positive news about brands (Sallam, 2014).

*H7: Word of mouth positively and significantly affect purchase decisions.*

Based on the previous explanation, the research model for the study is represented in Figure 1:

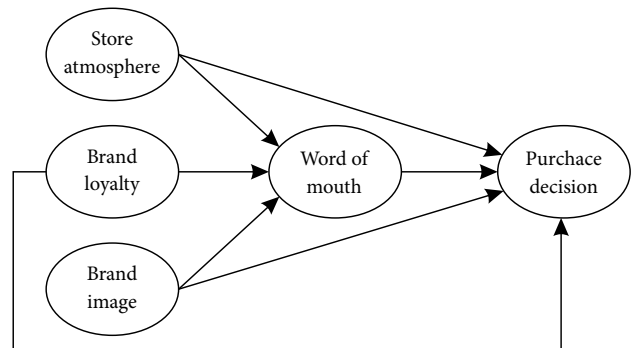


Figure 1. Research model

**2. Method**

This study employs a quantitative approach. The research focuses on Uniqlo brand fashion consumers. The criteria selection is because Uniqlo is a well-known brand that always follows recent fashion trends. This study collects data from numerous cities in Indonesia. The non-probability with incidental sampling technique is being used for sampling technique (Hair et al., 2014). This study’s representative sample was 118 respondents, as determined by the iteration approach. The study employs five variables: store atmosphere, brand loyalty, word of mouth, brand image, and purchase decision. The questionnaire method was used to collect data, then measured using a Likert scale. The IBM SPSS Statistics 23 software was utilized for partial test data analysis and path analysis.

**3. Results and discussion**

**3.1. Validity test and reliability test**

The validity test included 30 initial respondents who represented the total number of study participants in this study. There are three invalid assertions based on the validity test computation using IBM SPSS Statistics 23 outcome. Invalid assertions were discovered in two variables: store atmosphere and purchasing decisions. There are two items of the invalid assertion in the store atmosphere, which is the cleanliness indicator. The Cronbach’s Alpha scores obtained for every variable significantly greater than 0.70 based on the outcome of the reliability tests, then all variables are deemed reliable.

**3.2. Normality test**

The result of the normality test is represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Kolmogorov-Smirnov result

	Unstandardized Residual
Statistical Test	0.80
. Sig	.094 <sup>c</sup>

According to Table 1, the value of the Kolmogorov Smirnov score is 0.80, with a sig score of 0.94, indicating that the score is  $\geq 0.05$ . The distribution of residual data results means research data is normal.

### 3.3. Multicollinearity test

Table 2 shows the result of the multicollinearity tests as follows:

Table 2. Result of multicollinearity test

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Store Atmosphere	0.62	1.6
Brand Loyalty	0.54	1.9
Brand Image	0.41	2.4
Purchase Decision	0.53	1.9

According to Table 2, the tolerance score among all independent variables is higher than 0.1 and has a VIF score under 10. As a result, multicollinearity was not found in the research.

### 3.4. Heteroskedasticity test

The following are the heteroskedasticity test results shown in Table 3:

Table 3. Result of heteroskedasticity test

Variable	t	Sig.
Store Atmosphere	-0.45	0.650
Brand Loyalty	-0.06	0.950
Brand Image	-0.10	0.920
Word of Mouth	-0.37	0.700

Table 3 clearly reveals that the significance score of overall independent variables is higher than 0.05. It may be inferred that heteroscedasticity is not discovered in the regression model throughout this study. As a result, the regression model in this study passed the classical assumption test.

### 3.5. Statistical test (t-test)

The statistical test outcomes are provided in Table 4 as follows:

Table 4. The result of the hypothesis test

Variable	t	Sig.
Store Atmosphere	.650	.515
Brand Loyalty	2.341	.029
Brand Image	3.431	.001
Word of Mouth	4.287	.000

According to Table 4, the store atmosphere does not influence the purchasing decision. The level of significance

in the store atmosphere is  $0.515 > 0.005$ . As a result, H1, which asserts that the store atmosphere is positive and significantly influences the purchase decision, is rejected. These findings show that the store atmosphere does not seem to affect Uniqlo customers' purchasing decisions in Indonesia. Any changes in the store atmosphere, whether increase or decrease, will not lead to an increase or reduction in purchase decisions. Research result indicates that customers would not alter their purchasing decisions solely based on their analysis of the situation of the store atmosphere.

The findings of this research agree with Wijaya et al. (2017) which discovered that store atmosphere has no substantial influence on purchasing decisions. Uniqlo customers in Indonesia purchase goods depending on their necessities and fashion trend. Customers do not consider the current store atmosphere while making purchasing decisions. In this case, Uniqlo customers have a useful motivation for shopping; therefore, they are particularly focused on their primary purpose of purchasing goods. Customers favor the quality of the product over the shopping experience given by the store atmosphere.

According to the statistical test outcomes, the brand loyalty variable does have a significant  $0.029 < 0.005$ . As a result, H2 is acknowledged, claiming that brand loyalty has a positive and substantial influence on purchasing decisions. Research result indicates brand loyalty increased or decreased concerning purchase decision dynamics. The findings of this research are consistent with the findings of Su and Chang (2018), which found that brand loyalty has a positive and substantial influence on purchasing decisions. According to the fact, Uniqlo customers in Indonesia have a tremendous desire to have Uniqlo's goods. Customers would be eager to devote their time, energy, and money to have the goods they seek. According to Jung et al. (2020) brand loyalty plays an essential role in gauging customer interactions with brands and increasing customer interactions with brands. Furthermore, brand loyalty can raise customer purchasing interest, which also will influence customer purchasing decisions (Millan et al., 2013).

According to the statistical test outcomes, the brand image variable has a significant level of  $0.001 < 0.005$ . As a result, H3, which implies that brand image has a positive and substantial effect on purchasing decisions, is approved. Research result indicates that a positive or negative brand image influences the increase or decrease in purchasing decisions. The findings of this research are similar to the findings of Propheto et al. (2020), which discovered that brand image had a positive and substantial influence on purchasing decisions. Oladepo and Abimbola (2015) also emphasized a positive and substantial relationship between brand image and purchasing decisions.

Brand image has a significant role in shaping more specific impressions of purchasing behavior. Customer impressions of the brand would have an impact on their purchasing decisions. According to the outcomes of the

descriptive analysis of variables, Uniqlo’s image is positive, which positively influences customer purchase decisions. The statistical test outcomes show that the word of mouth variable has a significant level of  $0.000 < 0.005$ . As a result, H7, which states that word of mouth positively affects purchasing decisions, is approved. Hence, word of mouth increases or decreases purchasing decisions. The findings of this research similar with Cheung and Lee (2012) which discovered that word of mouth had a positive and substantial influence on purchasing decisions. Sallam (2014) also claim that word of mouth substantially influences decision-making.

Word of mouth has become the most impactful form of advertising that can affect customers. Customers are eager to spread information to others about the brand, goods, services, and anything else relevant to their product-consuming experience. Because customers trust information given by someone they know, the information seems to be more successful in influencing them. According to the findings Tien et al. (2019), the most convincing adverts come from the consumer trust completely. Costumers’ belief in information obtained through word of mouth will assist in making purchase decisions.

### 3.6. Path analysis

Table 5. Model summary regression model I

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	.689 <sup>a</sup>	.472	.461

Based on Table 5, the following residual values can be calculated:

$$e_1 = \sqrt{1 - R^2}, \text{ therefore } e_1 = \sqrt{1 - 0.472} = 0.726. \quad (1)$$

Based on the computation of the residual (error) variable store atmosphere, brand loyalty, and brand image of the purchasing decision, a value of 0.726 or 72.6% was found, indicating that variables outside the study model influence the word of mouth variable by 72.6%.

Table 6. Effect of store atmosphere, brand loyalty, and brand image on word of mouth in the regression model I

Variable	Beta	t	Sig.
Store Atmosphere	.219	2.599	.011
Brand loyalty	.194	2.107	.037
Brand Image	.389	3.866	.000

Based on Tables 5 and 6, the equation for Regression Model I is composed as follows:

$$WOM = \beta_1 SA + \beta_2 BL + \beta_3 BI + e_1; \quad (2)$$

$$WOM = (0.219)SA + (0.194) BL + (0.389) BI + 0.726. \quad (3)$$

According to the model I regression equation, the store atmosphere, brand loyalty, and brand image are positively

correlated with word of mouth. The research result implies that the independent variable directly influences the dependent variable. If the store atmosphere, brand loyalty, and brand image increase, it will be word of mouth. The store atmosphere variable has a regression coefficient of 0.219, the brand loyalty variable has a coefficient of 0.194, and the brand image variable has a coefficient of 0.389.

Table 7. Model summary regression model II

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Standard Error
1	.773 <sup>a</sup>	.598	.583	3.117

Referring to Table 7, the residual values are found as follows:

$$e_1 = \sqrt{1 - R^2}, \text{ therefore } e_1 = \sqrt{1 - 0.598} = 0.634. \quad (4)$$

The residual error variables store atmosphere, brand loyalty, brand image, and word of mouth to the purchasing decision got a score of 0.634 or 63.4% based on the computation of residual error variables. Research indicates that variables outside the study model have a 63.4% influence on the purchasing decision variable.

Table 8. Effects of store atmosphere, brand loyalty, brand image, and word of mouth on purchase decision in regression model II

Variable	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)		2,641	.009
Store Atmosphere (SA)	.050	.653	.515
Brand loyalty (BL)	.189	2.209	.029
Brand Image (BI)	.391	3.368	.001
Word of Mouth (WOM)	.344	4.285	.000

According to Tables 7 and 8, the regression model II equation is composed as follows:

$$PD = \beta_1 SA + \beta_2 BL + \beta_3 BI + \beta_4 WOM + e_1; \quad (5)$$

$$PD = (0.05)SA + (0.189)BL + (0.391)BI + (0.344)WOM + 0.634. \quad (6)$$

Referring to the model II regression equation, the store atmosphere, brand loyalty, brand image, and word of mouth all have a positive correlation with purchasing decisions. This implies that the independent variable directly affects the dependent variable, which indicates that as the store atmosphere, brand loyalty, brand image, and word of mouth increase, so will the purchasing decision. The value of the regression coefficient for the store atmosphere variable is 0.5, the value of the regression coefficient for the brand loyalty variable is 0.189, the magnitude of the regression coefficient for the brand image variable is 0.308, and the value of the regression coefficient for the word of mouth variable is 0.344.

Table 9. Results of analysis of direct and indirect effects

Store atmosphere			
Influence	Word of Mouth	Purchase Decision	Total Effect
Direct		0.511	0.511
Indirect	0.221	0.344	0.076
Total indirect effect			0.581
Brand loyalty			
Influence	Word of Mouth	Purchase Decision	Total Effect
Direct		0.179	0.179
Indirect	0.189	0.344	0.071
Total indirect effect			0.249
Brand Image			
Influence	Word of Mouth	Purchase Decision	Total Effect
Direct		0.308	0.308
Indirect	0.391	0.344	0.128
Total indirect effect			0.449

The findings of the computation of the overall influence of store atmosphere path coefficients on purchasing decisions through word of mouth of 0.581 > the direct impact of store atmosphere variables on purchasing decisions of 0.511, shown in Table 9. As a result, it can be inferred that H4 is acceptable. This implies that word of mouth through both the store atmosphere and purchasing decisions. Whether there is an increase or decrease in the store atmosphere would be accompanied by an increase or decrease in word of mouth, which will be led by an increase or decrease in purchasing decisions.

The findings of this research are consistent with the findings of Blut et al. (2018), which discovered that the store atmosphere had a positive and substantial influence on purchasing decisions made through word of mouth. A great store atmosphere will become the focus of customer conversation, and the talk will influence customer purchasing decisions. Customers are more likely to talk about something distinctive and fascinating to them. Based on fact, Uniqlo has implemented an intriguing store idea with a contemporary style highlighted by the company's signature colors of red and white. This might be a tangible discussion among customers and other customers who can impact their purchasing decisions.

Aside from mediating the connection between store atmosphere and purchasing decisions, word of mouth can also mediate the connection between brand loyalty and purchasing decisions. This one is supported by the computation of the total influence of the brand loyalty path coefficient on the purchasing decision through word of mouth of 0.249 > the direct impact of the brand loyalty variable on the purchasing decision of 0.189, indicating that H5 is acceptable. This implies that word of mouth act

as an intermediary between brand loyalty and purchasing decisions. Whether there is an increase or decrease in brand loyalty, there will also be an increase or decrease in word of mouth, accompanied by an increase or decrease in purchasing decisions.

The findings of this research are corroborated by the study of Kim et al. (2015), which found that brand loyalty has a positive and substantial influence on word of mouth. This study is also validated by the findings of Rialti et al. (2017), which revealed that brand loyalty has a positive and substantial influence on purchasing decisions through word of mouth.

Customer brand loyalty or passion for brands or goods can result in positive word of mouth between customers, who will promote and advocate the brand or goods to everyone else. Referrals from others can impact a customer's decision to make a purchase. According to the descriptive variable analysis outcomes, Uniqlo customers in Indonesia show a strong affinity for the Uniqlo brand. This one has a beneficial influence on word-of-mouth among Uniqlo customers, affecting their purchasing decisions.

Word of mouth intermediary a brand's image and a customer's decision to purchase. The overall impact of the brand image path coefficient on purchasing decisions through word of mouth is 0.449 > the direct influence of brand image variables on purchasing decisions is 0.308. As a result, we can assume that H6 is acceptable. This implies that A word of mouth can act as an intermediary between brand image and purchasing decisions. Whether there is an increase or decrease in brand image, there will also be an increase or decrease in word of mouth, which will then be accompanied by an increase or decrease in purchasing decisions.

The findings of this study are corroborated by the findings of Prihandono et al. (2020), which show that brand image has a positive and substantial influence on purchasing decisions made through word of mouth. Since the brand image will be connected with customers when using the goods, it becomes a significant factor when purchasing. When a brand has a positive image, it can convince customers to talk about it and promote it to everyone else, impacting customer purchasing decisions.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions, it is possible to conclude that the store's atmosphere does not influence customers' purchase decisions. Moreover, customers do not notice the store atmosphere while making a purchasing decision. Even though the store atmosphere does not significantly affect purchasing decisions, it influences word of mouth. Word of mouth could also mediate the effect of brand loyalty and brand image on purchasing decisions, bridging the connection between store atmosphere and purchasing decisions. This shows the importance of word of mouth in affecting customer purchasing decisions. As a result, the brand must maintain positive customer word

of mouth. Word of mouth could be profoundly influenced by creating a distinctive ambiance and intriguing stores, such as offering an eye-catching special location or center of mass to entice customers to visit stores. Customers will be the topic of discussion. Brands may also generate positive word of mouth by developing goods that can present themselves to customers and reflect their personality.

Furthermore, brands can engage in emotional branding, establishing a deep emotional bond among brands and customers to bolster customer relations with the brand. Positive word of mouth can influence customer purchasing decisions. According to the study findings, one of the store atmosphere variables did not influence the purchasing decision variable. As a result, an additional study will be conducted in Uniqlo Stores in several cities that use the same method to compare Uniqlo customer habits in numerous cities. Furthermore, a study can be undertaken at many store outlets to compare customer purchasing behavior at each outlet. Future studies can further widen the sample and identify other factors impacting consumer purchasing decisions, such as quality of products and knowledge of products.

### Author contributions

Bayu Wiratama arranges research framework and data analysis. Angga Pandu Wijaya develop introduction. Dorojatun Prihandono develop literature review. Andhi Wijayanto create result and discussion. Usep Suhud exploring research contribution and collect questionnaire.

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